

Susan Doran. *Mary Queen of Scots: An Illustrated Life*. British Library, 2007. Pp. 191; ill. ISBN: 978-0-712-34916-1.

DR. SUSAN DORAN, who teaches early modern history at Christ Church, Oxford, and has published widely on the reign of Elizabeth I, writes a clear and concise biography of Mary Queen of Scots in this volume. There are no surprises here, no new theories; the occasion of this volume is clearly to offer a taste of the documents related to Mary in the British Library collection. Also included are beautifully reproduced portraits of the principal players in her life.

Doran brings to the text a broad and deep knowledge of the period and the courts of France and England, so vital to coming to an understanding of Mary's roles. Her coverage of Scottish government and politics is comparatively narrower, but that appears to be to the purpose. She states in the introduction, "Mary was immensely influential during her lifetime, not so much because of her deeds, but because of her dynastic relationship to the Guises in France and the Tudors in England." This argument guides her narrative.

The documents reproduced are chosen with obvious care to illustrate the dramatic shifts in Mary's life. Included are letters both official and personal; but despite Doran's statement on the copyright page that "the size of certain documents has been adjusted to aid legibility," any serious study would require the originals. This is simply a taste of the materials in the collection and not a resource book. That said, it is a useful selection, encouraging further exploration. The choices and the layout are inspired, such as the felicitous pairing of the portrait of Henry Darnley and his love poem to Mary—his appearance was as delicate and elegant as the writing. It's interesting to see a letter dictated by Queen Elizabeth and written by William Cecil but ending in her famous signature—a snapshot of their working relationship. More chilling are Cecil's notes for and against Mary—the contra list is not only longer, but more detailed.

The illustrations include many fine portraits. My favorites are chalk drawings of Mary at 9 ½ years and the dauphin, her betrothed, a year younger—she appears a lovely young woman, he a self-satisfied child. An engraving of Henri II's triumphal entry into Rouen depicts the huge papier mâché elephants carrying models of French forts, a brilliant accompaniment to the text. Burghley's diagram of a seating plan for Mary's trial at Fotheringhay is placed on the same page as a pencil and ink drawing of the actual trial by Robert Beale—accommodations had to be made for the Privy Council.

This is a useful and engaging introduction to Mary Queen of Scots and the extant documents concerning her life. The section "Further Reading" is

excellent, broken down into general background, introductory texts, and then specifically books and articles to flesh out the themes of the chapters. Doran has put together just the sort of volume I seek out when trawling for tidbits that will add depth to my understanding of a historical figure. Would that we had such a treasure trove for fourteenth-century women of the court!

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